

NATURAL RESOURCES

**The below regulatory summaries were referenced from the U.S. Northern Review publications and Fedcenter.gov.

FEDERAL

FINAL:

MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has issued a final rule approving the use of corrosion-inhibited copper shot for hunting waterfowl and coots ([82 FR 51358](#)). The service concluded that this type of shot left in terrestrial or aquatic environments is unlikely to adversely affect fish, wildlife, or their habitats. Approval of this shot formulation increases the nontoxic shot options for hunters. The final rule became effective 6 NOV 17.

PROPOSED:

CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS WITH ASSURANCES. FWS has announced its intention to review and potentially revise regulations concerning enhancement-of-survival permits issued under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), associated with Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) ([82 FR 55550](#)). In addition, in a related matter, FWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) jointly announced their intention to review and potentially revise the CCAA policy ([82 FR 55625](#)). Through the candidate conservation program, FWS encouraged the public to voluntarily develop and implement conservation agreements for declining species prior to listing under the ESA.

MITIGATION POLICIES. FWS has requested public comment on portions of its existing Mitigation Policy and Endangered Species Act Compensatory Mitigation Policy ([82 FR 51382](#)). FWS specifically requests comment on the policies' mitigation planning goals. . In response to [EO 13783](#) and DOI's [Order 3349](#) on American Energy Independence, FWS is soliciting input regarding whether to retain or remove net conservation gain as a mitigation planning goal within FWS's mitigation policies.

CANDY DARTER PROPOSED AS THREATENED SPECIES. FWS announced a 12-month finding on a petition to list the candy darter, a freshwater fish species from Virginia and West Virginia, as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and to designate critical habitat ([82 FR 46197](#)). After review of the best available scientific and commercial information, FWS found that listing the candy darter is warranted and has proposed listing it as a threatened species under the ESA.

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STATE

FINAL:

[HB 617](#) ([SB 29](#)) FOREST CONSERVATION THRESHOLDS AND REQUIREMENTS. HB 617 (Public Act: 795) clarifies that a unit of local government with planning and zoning authority may adopt specified forest conservation thresholds and afforestation and reforestation requirements, as part of its local forest conservation program, that are more stringent than certain state law. The bill was not signed by the governor, but it was enacted under Article II, Section 17(c) of the Maryland Constitution and became effective on 1 JUN 17.

[HB 830](#) ([SB 386](#)) POLLINATOR HABITAT PLAN REQUIREMENTS. HB 830 (Public Act: 755) requires that pollinator habitat plans established by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the Maryland Environmental Service, and the State Highway Administration be as protective of pollinators as the Maryland Department of Agriculture's managed pollinator protection plan. The bill also: (1) requires contents of the plans to be modified to focus on pollinator habitat areas, rather than pollinator habitats; (2) specifies that pollinator habitat plans must include best management practices for the designation, maintenance, creation, enhancement, and restoration of pollinator habitat areas; and (3) prohibits the use of certain pesticides, seeds, or plants in the pollinator habitat plan. The bill was signed by the governor on 25 MAY 17 and it becomes effective on 1 JUL 17. The governor vetoed the companion bill, SB 386, citing it was duplicative.

AMENDMENTS TO THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES REGULATIONS. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) has adopted amendments to COMAR 08.03.08, Threatened and Endangered Species. The amendments: (1) list 23 new species of animals and plants in need of conservation, or that are endangered, threatened or endangered extirpated; (2) reclassify 31 species that are currently listed as in need of conservation, threatened, endangered or endangered extirpated; (3) provide protection for 10 nongame mammal species that are not currently listed and for one mammal species that is proposed to be delisted; and (4) repeal and replace certain regulations due to the large number of proposed plant species' common name changes. A notice of the proposed amendments was published in the February 2016 Northern Review. The amendments became effective on 29 AUG 16.

[HB 797](#) NONTIDAL WETLAND MITIGATION BANKING HB 797 (Public Act: 631) amends the state's nontidal wetland mitigation policy to conform to standards established under the 2008 federal mitigation rule. The amendments: (1) repeal current law provisions that establish compensation ratios for wetland mitigation through mitigation banks; (2) require the potential for on-site mitigation to be considered whenever it may be environmentally preferable; (3) add specificity to mitigation bank policies; and (4) add several related definitions. The bill also states that mitigation through a mitigation bank must be accomplished within a "service area," as determined by the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) in coordination with an interagency review team. Finally, the bill establishes that public notice and comment is required when siting any wetland bank, not just those that are greater than five acres in size. A notice of the bill's introduction was published in the March 2016 Northern Review. The bill was signed by the governor on 19 MAY 16 and became effective on 1 JUL 16.

PROPOSED:

WITHDRAWAL OF PROPOSED RULE TO LIST KENK'S AMPHIPOD. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has withdrawn a proposed rule to list the Kenk's amphipod, an invertebrate from the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, as an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act as amended ([82 FR 45551](#)). The

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withdrawal is based on the conclusion that threats to the species identified in the proposed rule are not as significant as previously determined and the proposed listing is not warranted. FWS based this conclusion on analysis of new information concerning the results of new surveys, current and future threats, and conservation efforts. FWS finds the best scientific and commercial data available indicate that the Kenk's amphipod does not meet the statutory definitions of an endangered or threatened species. The withdrawal became effective on 29 SEP 17.

AMENDMENTS TO REGULATION OF INVASIVE PLANTS. The Maryland Department of Agriculture has [proposed](#) amendments to COMAR 15.06.04, Regulation of Invasive Plants. The amendments: (1) add two plants to the list of Tier 1 invasive plants and two to the list of Tier 2 invasive plants; (2) define the procedure for the classification or the declassification of a Tier 1 and/ or Tier 2 invasive plant; and (3) clarify that landscapers who plant or supply for the planting a tier 2 invasive plant must provide their customers a list of Tier 2 invasive plants.

REGULATION OF INVASIVE PLANTS The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) [proposed](#) amendments to COMAR 15.06.04, Regulation of Invasive Plants. The amendments: (1) establish a list of tier 1 plants and tier 2 plants in accordance with MDA's risk assessment protocol; (2) establish a procedure for the classification or the declassification of an invasive plant as a tier 1 invasive plant or a tier 2 invasive plant; (3) establish a procedure for the disposal of tier 1 plants; (4) designate signage requirements; and (5) provide for the distribution of a list of tier 2 invasive plants to licensed nurseries, plant dealers, and plant brokers on an annual basis.

AMENDMENTS TO THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES REGULATIONS The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) [proposed](#) amendments to [COMAR 08.03.08](#), Threatened and Endangered Species. The amendments: (1) list 23 new species of animals and plants in need of conservation, or that are endangered, threatened or endangered extirpated; (2) reclassify 31 species that are currently listed as in need of conservation, threatened, endangered or endangered extirpated; (3) provide protection for 10 nongame mammal species that are not currently listed and for one mammal species that is proposed to be delisted; and (4) repeal and replace certain regulations due to the large number of proposed plant species' common name changes.

FEDERAL

FINAL:

MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has issued a final rule prescribing the hunting seasons, hours, areas, and daily bag and possession limits for migratory game birds ([82 FR 34752](#)). Taking of migratory birds is prohibited unless specifically provided for by annual regulations. This rule permits the taking of designated species during the 2017-18 season. The final rule became effective on 26 JUL 17.

DESIGNATION OF CRITICAL HABITAT FOR ATLANTIC STURGEON. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has issued a final rule designating critical habitat for the Atlantic sturgeon ([82 FR 39160](#)). The designation includes five distinct population segments (DPS) of Atlantic sturgeon including the endangered Chesapeake Bay DPS. The habitat consists of designated river and stream miles, rather than estuaries or bays. Maps and other information are available [here](#). The final rule became effective on 18 SEP 17.

INITIATION OF ESA STATUS REVIEW FOR ALEWIFE AND BLUEBACK HERRING UNDER. NMFS initiated a new status review of [alewife](#) and [blueback herring](#) to determine whether listing either species as endangered or threatened under Endangered Species Act (ESA) is warranted ([82 FR 38672](#)). The historical distribution of the species is throughout the Atlantic seaboard, from Newfoundland to the St. Johns River, Florida.

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FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE EAST CAMPUS INTEGRATION PROGRAM, FORT MEADE.

DOD has announced the availability of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as part of the environmental planning process for the East Campus Integration Program at Fort Meade ([82 FR 12201](#)).

EXECUTIVE ORDER 13751 – SAFEGUARDING THE NATION FROM THE IMPACTS OF INVASIVE SPECIES. President Obama issued Executive Order (EO) 13751, Safeguarding the Nation From the Impacts of Invasive Species ([81 FR 88609](#)). This order updates EO 13112, Invasive Species, issued on 3 FEB 1999.

REGULATIONS FOR EAGLE INCIDENTAL TAKE AND TAKE OF EAGLE NESTS. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) issued a final rule revising the regulations for eagle nonpurposeful take permits and eagle nest take permits ([81 FR 91494](#)). The final rule became effective on 17 JAN 17.

REVISIONS TO REGULATIONS FOR CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS WITH ASSURANCES. FWS issued a final rule revising regulations concerning enhancement-of-survival permits issued under the ESA, associated with Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances ([81 FR 95053](#)). The final rule was to be effective on 26 JAN 17.

MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL OCEAN ACTION PLAN. The Nation Ocean Council submitted the [Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Action Plan](#) for certification that the plan meets requirements established by the National Ocean Policy, recommendations of the Interagency Ocean Policy Taskforce, and the Marine Planning Handbook ([81 FR 76635](#)). The Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body includes the six states of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia; two federally recognized tribes; and multiple federal agencies.

COMPENSATORY MITIGATION POLICY. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) revised its compensatory mitigation policy, which has guided service recommendations on mitigating the adverse impacts of land and water developments on fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats since 1981 ([81 FR 83440](#)). The final policy became effective on 21 NOV 16. For more information, visit [regulations.gov](#), Docket Number FWS-HQ-ES-2015-0126, or FWS [compensatory mitigation website](#).

UPDATED THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST. FWS issued a final rule to update the list of threatened and endangered species in accordance with prior determinations made by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) ([81 FR 76311](#)). The final rule updates entries which include the North Atlantic right whale to reflect an applicable rule citation. The final rule became effective on 2 NOV 16.

NATIONAL HANDBOOK OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is revising conservation practices standards in the National Handbook of Conservation Practices ([81 FR 69779](#)). State conservationists who choose to adopt the practices for use within their states will incorporate them into section IV of their respective electronic Field Office Technical Guides. The final changes became effective on 7 OCT 16.

REVISIONS TO REGULATIONS FOR PETITIONS. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have jointly issued a final rule finalizing revisions to the regulations concerning petitions ([81 FR 66461](#)). The final rule becomes effective on 27 OCT 16.

12-MONTH FINDINGS ON NINE PETITIONS. FWS announced 12-month findings on petitions to list nine species as threatened or endangered ([81 FR 64843](#)). The findings were issued 21 SEP 16.

ENDANGERED AND THREATENED LISTING FORMAT. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has issued a final rule amending the format of the Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants to reflect current practices and standards ([81 FR 51549](#)). The final rule became effective on 4 AUG 16.

ANTHROPOGENIC SOUND. NMFS has issued final technical guidance for assessing the effects of anthropogenic sound on marine mammal hearing ([81 FR 51693](#)). The [guidance](#) provides updated received levels, or acoustic thresholds, above which individual marine mammals under NMFS jurisdiction are predicted to experience changes

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in their hearing sensitivity (either temporary or permanent) for all underwater anthropogenic sound sources.

METHODOLOGY FOR PRIORITIZING STATUS REVIEWS, 12-MONTH FINDINGS FWS has released a final methodology for prioritizing status reviews and accompanying 12-month findings on petitions for listing species under the Endangered Species Act ([81 FR 49248](#)). According to FWS, the National Listing Workplan will be posted [here](#).

DESIGNATION OF EXPERIMENTAL POPULATIONS The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a final rule regarding experimental populations under the ESA ([81 FR 33416](#)). The final rule became effective on 27 JUN 16.

U.S. FRESHWATER TURTLES PROTECTED FROM INTERNATIONAL TRADE FWS issued a [final rule](#) protecting four species of freshwater turtles from illegal trade ([81 FR 32664](#)) including the common snapping turtle, Florida softshell turtle, smooth softshell turtle, and spiny softshell turtle, under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ([CITES](#)). The final rule becomes effective on 21 NOV 16.

FOREST SERVICE ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION POLICY The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) issued a permanent Ecosystem Restoration policy that replaces the Interim Directive, Ecological Restoration and Resilience Policy, in the USFS Manual 2020 ([81 FR 24785](#)). The directive became effective on 27 MAY 16. For more information, click [here](#).

NATIONAL WETLAND CONDITION ASSESSMENT USEPA released the first ever [National Wetland Condition Assessment](#), a collaborative survey of the nation's wetlands ([81 FR 30300](#)). The National Wetland Condition Assessment is part of a series of [aquatic resource surveys](#) designed to advance the science of coastal monitoring and answer critical questions about the condition of waters in the United States. To view a fact sheet, click [here](#).

NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM [Public Law No: 114-162](#), signed in May 2016, reauthorized the [National Estuary Program](#) by amending the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.

WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE RISK MITIGATION President Obama issued Executive Order (EO) 13728, Wildland-Urban Interface Federal Risk Mitigation ([81 FR 32221](#)). The EO directs federal departments and agencies to enhance the wildfire resilience of their buildings when making investment decisions to ensure continued performance of essential functions and to reduce risks to building occupants.

NATIONAL PLANT LIST The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) released the final [2016 National Wetland Plant List](#) ([81 FR 22580](#)). The list, effective 1 MAY 16, must be used in any wetland delineation performed after this date. Delineations received prior to this date may use the 2014 list.

NORTHERN LONG-EARED BAT LONG-EARED BAT USFWS issued a determination that it is not prudent to designate critical habitat for the [northern long-eared bat](#) ([81 FR 24707](#)). The species was listed as threatened in April 2015. The determination was made on 27 APR 16.

NORTHERN LONG-EARED BAT CONSERVATION USFWS issued a final rule that establishes necessary measures to provide for the conservation of the northern long-eared bat ([81 FR 1900](#)). The northern long-eared bat ranges from Alaska down to northern Florida, but is absent from western United States. The final rule became effective on 16 FEB 2016.

REGIONAL MONITORING NETWORKS TO DETECT CHANGING BASELINES IN FRESHWATER WADEABLE STREAMS USEPA released a document, Regional Monitoring Networks (RMNs) to Detect Changing Baselines in Freshwater Wadeable Streams ([81 FR 10240](#)).

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT: INTERAGENCY COORDINATION POLICY The USFWS) and NMFS have announced an interagency policy to clarify the role of state agencies in activities undertaken by the services under authority of the

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Endangered Species Act (ESA) and associated regulations ([81 FR 8663](#)). The updated policy was published on 22 FEB 2016. For more information, click [here](#).

INTERAGENCY COOPERATION: DEFINITIONS – DESTRUCTION OR ADVERSE MODIFICATION USFWS and NMFS have issued a final rule revising the definition of “destruction or adverse modification” of critical habitat, which is integral to the implementation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) ([80 FR 7214](#)). The final rule became effective 14 MAR 2016.

EXCLUSION FROM CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATION USFWS and NMFS have released their final policy on excluding lands from critical habitat designation ([81 FR 7226](#)). The final policy became effective on 14 MAR 2016.

REGULATIONS FOR DESIGNATING CRITICAL HABITAT USFWS and NMFS have issued a final rule amending the regulations that clarify, interpret, and implement procedures and criteria used for adding species to the lists of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants and designating and revising critical habitat ([81 FR 7413](#)). The final rule became effective 14 MAR 2016.

EAGLE TAKE PERMIT DURATION USFWS issued a final rule reinstating the five-year maximum programmatic permit limit for eagle non-purposeful take permits ([81 FR 8001](#)). The final rule became effective on 17 FEB 2016.

NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALE NMFS has issued a final rule expanding critical habitat for the endangered North Atlantic right whales to cover its northeast feeding areas in the Gulf of Maine/Georges Bank region and southeast calving grounds from North Carolina to Florida ([81 FR 4837](#)). The final rule does not exclude any particular area from the final critical habitat.

NATIONAL COASTAL CONDITION ASSESSMENT USEPA released the final National Coastal Condition Assessment 2010 ([81 FR 3409](#)).

PROPOSED:

MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING REGULATIONS. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has issued a proposed rule to establish annual hunting regulations for certain migratory game birds for the 2018-19 hunting season ([82 FR 36308](#)). The proposed rule provides the regulatory schedule, announces the Service Migratory Bird Regulations Committee and Flyway Council meetings, and describes the proposed regulatory alternatives for the 2018-19 duck hunting seasons. The service annually prescribes frameworks within which states may select hunting seasons.

FIVE-YEAR STATUS REVIEWS OF 23 SOUTHEASTERN SPECIES. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has initiated five-year status reviews of 23 species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) ([82 FR 29916](#)).

ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES - LISTING AND RECOVERY PRIORITY GUIDELINES. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has issued a notice of proposed revisions to the Recovery Plan Preparation and Implementation Priorities and Recovery Plans contained in the 1990 Listing and Recovery Priority Guidelines ([82 FR 24944](#)).

CANDIDATE NOTICE OF REVIEW. FWS issued a [Candidate Notice of Review](#), which presents an updated list of plant and animal species native to the U.S. that are regarded as candidates for, or have been proposed for addition to the lists of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) ([81 FR 87246](#)).

COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) issued a proposed rule to streamline requirements for states amending their approved coastal zone management

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program ([81 FR 78514](#)).

COMPENSATORY MITIGATION POLICY. FWS released its draft Compensatory Mitigation Policy for public comment ([81 FR 61031](#)). The compensatory mitigation policy is consistent with recent [Executive Office](#) and [Department Of Interior](#) mitigation policies.

RUSTY PATCHED BUMBLE BEE. FWS proposed listing the [rusty patched bumble bee](#) as endangered ([81 FR 65324](#)). The species, once widespread throughout its range, now occurs in scattered small populations in the 12 states of Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

KENK'S AMPHIPOD. FWS proposed listing the [Kenk's amphipod](#) as endangered ([81 FR 67270](#)). The Kenk's amphipod is a small shrimp-like freshwater crustacean from the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia.

NATIONAL HANDBOOK OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) proposed to issue a series of revised conservation practice standards in the National Handbook of Conservation Practices ([81 FR 56579](#)).

PERIODIC REVIEW OF REGULATIONS. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published a proposed plan to comply with the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) ([81 FR 51426](#)).

HABITAT CONSERVATION PLANNING HANDBOOK The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) released a [draft revision](#) of their joint Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Handbook, which describes requirements, procedures, and guidance for permit issuance and conservation-plan development ([81 FR 41896](#)).

ATLANTIC STURGEON: CRITICAL HABITAT FOR THREE DPSs NMFS issued a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the Gulf of Maine, New York Bight, and Chesapeake Bay DPSs of [Atlantic Sturgeon](#) ([81 FR 35701](#)). The specific areas proposed for designation include approximately 453 miles of aquatic habitat in rivers in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia for the Chesapeake Bay DPS of Atlantic sturgeon.

EAGLE INCIDENTAL TAKE The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) issued a proposed rule to update its eagle conservation and management program, including revisions to its 2009 eagle incidental take permit and eagle nest take regulations ([81 FR 27933](#)). In a related effort, FWS released a [draft programmatic environmental impact statement](#) which analyzes the effects of eagle management at different geographic scales, different take limits for bald and golden eagles, and proposed permit revisions. For more information, click [here](#).

CANDIDATE CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS WITH ASSURANCES (CCAAs) FWS issued two separate proposed rules to amend the regulations and policy governing enhancement of survival permits associated with CCAAs ([81 FR 26796](#) and [81 FR 26817](#)).

PETITIONS FOR THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a proposed rule to revise a [May 2015](#) proposed rule that modified regulations governing petitions for T&E species conservation ([81 FR 23448](#)).

MITIGATION POLICY The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has announced proposed revisions to its mitigation policy ([81 FR 12379](#)). The primary intent of the policy is to apply mitigation in a strategic manner that ensures an effective linkage with conservation strategies at appropriate landscape scales.

NATIONAL HANDBOOK OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provided notice that it intends to issue a series of revised conservation practice standards in the National

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Handbook of Conservation Practices ([81 FR 11509](#)). These practices may be used in conservation systems that treat highly erodible land or on land determined to be a wetland.

ANTHROPOGENIC SOUND The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) proposed [amendments](#) to its draft Guidance for Assessing the Effects of Anthropogenic Sound on Marine Mammal Hearing ([81 FR 14095](#)). For more information, click [here](#).

ALL SALAMANDERS ADDED TO LIST OF INJURIOUS AMPHIBIANS USFWS issued an interim rule adding all 201 species of salamanders to the list of injurious amphibians ([81 FR 1534](#)). The interim rule prohibits, except by permit, both the importation into the U.S. and the interstate transportation of any live or dead specimen of the 20 genera of salamanders. The interim rule became effective on 28 JAN 2016.

WHITE TIPPED SHARK The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced that it will conduct a status review of the oceanic white-tipped shark to determine if listing is warranted ([81 FR 1376](#)).

OTHER

DETECTING AQUATIC SPECIES USING ENVIRONMENTAL DNA. EPA [announced a project](#) to assess freshwater mussel populations by collecting water or sediment samples and analyzing for the species' DNA. This new method of detecting mussel populations lowers the level of effort in traditional freshwater mussel assessments, and will help provide early warning of water quality changes and promote mussel restoration and management.

GAO REPORT: WILDLAND FIRE RISK REDUCTION. GAO released a report on factors that contribute to wildland fires and federal-nonfederal collaboration to reduce the risk of wildland fires ([GAO-17-357](#)). According to GAO, federal agencies can collaborate with nonfederal stakeholders to reduce the risk of wildland fires; this is a key aspect of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

GAO REPORT: CASE STUDY OF EFFECTIVENESS OF COMPENSATORY MITIGATION STRATEGIES. GAO released a report that evaluates the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) implementation of compensatory mitigation strategies, using FWS's American Burying Beetle Conservation Efforts as the study subject ([GAO 17-154](#)). FWS signed an interagency agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in February 2016 to modify its Regulatory In-lieu fee and Bank Information Tracking System, referred to as RIBITS, to enable FWS to track its in-lieu fee programs. However, GAO found that FWS has not obligated funds for the necessary modifications or developed a timetable.

FRAMEWORK FOR A FEDERAL STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SOIL SCIENCE. The Soil Science Interagency Working Group released a draft framework for a Federal Strategic Plan for Soil Science ([81 FR 87981](#)). The framework is available [here](#).

UPDATE TO HABITAT CONSERVATION PLANNING HANDBOOK. FWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service have released a final updated [Habitat Conservation Planning \(HCP\) Handbook](#). The handbook describes requirements, procedures, and guidance for permit issuance and conservation plan development for incidental take permits under ESA. The updated handbook establishes process standards and best practices, and also updates and refines policy guidance and procedures. These refinements streamline the HCP process and increase the overall effectiveness of the program.

PLANTS DATABASE AND WEBINAR The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) [PLANTS database](#) provides standardized information about the vascular plants, mosses, liverworts, hornworts, and lichens of the U.S. and its territories.

CLIMATE-READY ESTUARIES The USEPA Climate-Ready Estuaries (CRE) program has added sea-level rise resources

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to its [website](#). The CRE program works with the [National Estuary Program](#) and the coastal management community to assess climate change vulnerabilities, develop and implement adaptation strategies, and engage and educate stakeholders.

GUIDE FOR CONSIDERING CLIMATE CHANGE IN COASTAL CONSERVATION The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released a [new guide](#) providing a step-by-step approach for incorporating climate change information into new or existing conservation plans.

WHALE AND DOLPHIN DENSITY CHARTS New, highly detailed maps charting the seasonal movements and population densities of 35 species of whales, dolphins and porpoises in the crowded waters of the U.S. East Coast and Gulf of Mexico are now available. The [maps](#) integrate data from nearly 1.1 million linear kilometers of surveys and more than 26,000 sightings collected by researchers at five institutions over 23 years. To read more, click [here](#).